



CHAPTER XXVIII—Continued.

The light, gushing from the opaque hood, made the safe door a glare, and was thrown back into her intent young face. Even so, he would have recognized the sharp silhouette cut by her lithe, sweet body against the glow, the poise of her head, the carriage of her shoulders, the gracious bosom rounding her tailored coat.

She was all in black, even to her gloved hands—no trace of white or any color showing on her person but the fair curve of her cheek below the mask and the red of her lips. And if that were not enough, the intelligence with which she attacked the combination and the confident, businesslike precision that distinguished her every action proved her an apt pupil in that business.

His thoughts were all weltering in misery and confusion. He knew what this encounter meant, appreciated that it explained many things he would have thought questionable had not the strength of his infatuation forbade him to consider them at all; but in the pain and anguish of that moment he could entertain but one thought, which possessed him altogether—the thought that she must somehow be saved from the crime she contemplated.

But while he delayed, shrinking from the necessity of discovering himself to her, it was made clear that she had become sensitive to his presence.

He had made no sound since she entered, had not even stirred; but somehow she had divined that someone was there, in the recess of the window, watching her.

In the act of opening the safe—working the combination from that very sheet of paper on which he had made memoranda of its sequence—he saw her pause, freeze to a pose of attention, then turn to stare directly at the portiere behind which he was concealed. And through an eternal second he watched her kneeling there, so still that she seemed not even to breathe, her gaze fixed and level, waiting for some sound, some tremor of the drapery folds to confirm her suspicion.

When at length she stirred it was to rise in one swift, alert movement. And now as she paused with her slight shoulders squared and her head thrown back defiantly, challengingly, he knew she knew he was there.

As if without will of his own, but drawn irresistibly by her gaze, he stepped out from hiding.

And since he was no more the Lone Wolf, but now a simple man in agony, with no consideration for their situation, with no thought for the fact that they were both soundbreakers and that the slightest sound might raise a hue and cry upon them, he took a faltering step toward her, stopped, hung round a hand with a gesture of appeal, and stammered:

"Lucy—you—"

His voice broke. He waited.

She didn't answer other than to recoil as though he had offered to strike her, and she commenced to retreat, wearing a look of utter grief and wretchedness, until presently the table stopped her, and she leaned back against it, as if glad of the support.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling—"why—why did you do it?"

He might have answered her in kind, but self-justification passed his power. He couldn't say: "Because to-night you made me lose faith in life itself, and I thought to forget you by going to the devil the quickest way I knew—this way!"—though that was true. He couldn't say: "Because, a thief from boyhood, habit proved too strong for me, and I couldn't withstand temptation!"—for that was untrue.

He could only hang his head and wretchedly confess: "I don't know."

As if he hadn't spoken, as if she hadn't heard, she cried again. "Why—oh, why—did you do it? I was so proud of you, so sure of you—the man who had turned straight because of me! It compensated. But now!"

Her voice broke in a short, dry sob. "Compensated?" he repeated stupidly.

"Yes, compensated." She threw back her head with a gesture of impatience. "For this—don't you understand?—for this that I'm doing! You don't suppose I've come here for my own accord—that I went back to Bannan for any reason but to try to save you from him? I knew something of this power, and you didn't! I knew, if I went away with you he'd never rest until he had you murdered, if he had to follow you round the world to do it! And I thought if I could mislead him by lies for a little time—long enough to give you opportunity to leave France—I thought—perhaps—if I could overcome my terror of him—I might be able to communicate with the police, denounce him."

She hesitated, breathless and appealing.

At her first words he had drawn close to her; and all her speech was couched in muted murmurs, barely more than whisperings. And this was quite instinctive, for in the passion of that meeting both had been carried beyond considerations of prudence, their most coherent thought being that now, and for all time, all misunderstanding between them must be done away with.



(Copyright, by Louis Joseph Vance.)

And now, as naturally as though they had been lovers always, Lanyard possessed himself of her hand.

"You cared as much as that!" he said.

"I love you," she declared tensely—"I love you so much I am ready to sacrifice everything for you—life, liberty, honor."

"Hush, dearest, hush!" he begged, half distracted between joy and pain. "I mean it; if honor could hold me back, do you think I would have broken in here tonight to rob for Bannan?"

"He sent you, eh?" Lanyard commented in a dangerous voice.

"He was too cunning for me. I was afraid to tell you. I meant to tell you this evening in the cab. And then I thought perhaps if I were cold and distant and let you go on believing me the worst of women—perhaps you would go away, save yourself, forget me."

"Never!"

"I tried to carry out my program of lying to him, but he wouldn't have it. They forced the truth from me by threats."

"They wouldn't dare—"

"They dare anything, I tell you. But it wasn't threats of personal injury to me, but to you, if I refused to tell them the truth, the whole truth. They knew enough of what had happened, through their spies, to go on, and they tormented and bullied me until I broke down and told them everything. And when they learned you had replaced the jewels here, Bannan told me I must return and bring them to him. He said if I refused he'd have you killed before morning. I held out until tonight; then, just as I was going to bed, he received a telephone message, and told me you were driving a taxi and would be followed by Apaches and wouldn't live till daylight if I refused."

"You came alone?"

"No. Three men brought me to the gate. They're waiting outside in the park."

"Apaches?"

"Two of them—I presume they're Apaches, at least. The third is Captain Ekstrom."

"Ekstrom!" Lanyard cried in despair. "Is he—"

The dull but heavy slam of the great front doors silenced him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A Strange Interview.

Releasing the girl instantly, before the crash had ceased to reverberate within those walls, Lanyard slipped to one side of the doorway, whence he could command the perspective of salons together with a partial view of the front doors.

There was no more than established there, in the shadow and shelter of the portieres, when light from an electric floor flooded the reception hall.

It showed him first a single figure, that of a handsome woman well beyond middle age, but still well poised and vigorous of mien, a lady of commanding presence. She was in full evening dress of such magnificence as to suggest attendance at some function of state. Even had he not known well the features of Mme. Omber, he would have guessed her to be the mistress of the establishment.

Standing beneath the chandelier, she was restoring a key to a brocade handbag. This done, she turned her head and spoke over her shoulder. Promptly there came into view a second woman of much the same age, but even more strong and able of appearance—a woman in plain, dark garments, undoubtedly madame's maid.

Handing over her handbag, Mme. Omber unlatched the throat of her ermine cloak and surrendered it to the servant's hands.

Her next words were audible to the eavesdropper, and reassuring in so far as they indicated ignorance of anything amiss:

"Thank you, Sidonie. You may go to bed now."

"Many thanks, madame. Good-night, madame."

"Good-night."

The maid moved off toward the main staircase, while the mistress of the house turned deliberately through the salon toward the library.

At this, swinging back to the girl in a stride, and impulsively grasping her wrist to compel attention, Lanyard spoke in a rapid whisper, mouth close beside her cheek.

"This way," he said, imperatively drawing her toward the window by which he had entered. "There's a balcony outside—a short drop to the ground." And unlatching the window, he urged her through it. "Try to leave by the back gateway—the one I showed you—avoiding Ekstrom."

"But you are coming!" she insisted, hanging back.

"Impossible. There isn't time for us both to escape undetected. I shall keep her interested only long enough to give you plenty of time to get away. But take this—and he pressed his automatic into her hand. "No—take it. I've another," he lied, "and you may need it. Don't fear for me, but go—oh, my heart—go!"

The footfalls of Mme. Omber were sounding ominously near by this time; and without giving the girl more time



to protest, Lanyard thrust her forcibly through the windows, closed them, shot the latch and stole like a ghost round the farther side of the desk, pausing within a few feet of the screen and safe.

The footstep was muffled by a rug in the drawing room—the woman was walking slowly, heavily, like one weary and thoughtful.

Where the girl had placed it, behind the cinnabar screen, the desk-lamp was still alight, and Lanyard knew that the diffusion of its reflected rays was enough to project his figure in silhouette against the glow distinctly visible to one on the threshold.

Now everything hung upon the temperament of the householder, how she would take that apparition—whether quietly, deceived by Lanyard's mummery into believing she had only a poor thiefish fool to deal with, or with bourgeois hysteria.

In the latter event, Lanyard's hand was ready planted, palm down, on the top of the desk; should the other attempt to raise an alarm, a single bound would carry the adventurer across it in full flight for the front doors.

In the doorway the mistress of the house appeared and halted, quick, glinting eyes shifting from the glow on the floor to the dark figure of the thief. Then, with a quick gesture, putting forth a hand, she found the chandelier switch and turned on a blaze of light.

As this happened Lanyard cowered, lifting an elbow as if to guard his face—as if expecting to find himself under the muzzle of a revolver.

The gesture had the calculated effect of focusing the attention of the woman directly to him, after one swift glance round had taken in the curtains that were still swaying at the window, and shown her a room tenanted only by herself and a cowering thief. And immediately it was made manifest that, whether or not deceived, she meant to take the situation quietly, with a strong hand.

Her eyes narrowed and the muscles of her square and almost masculine jaw stood out ominously as she looked the intruder up and down in silence. Eventually a flicker of contempt moderated the grimness of her dark countenance. She took three steps forward, stopping on the other side of the desk, her back to the doorway.

Lanyard trembled visibly.

"Well!"—the word boomed like the opening gun of an engagement. "Well, my man!"—the shrewd eyes swerved to the closed door of the safe and quickly back again—"you don't seem to have accomplished a great deal!"

Lanyard gripped the edge of the desk, quivering.

"For God's sake, madame," he blurted in a husky, shaken voice, nothing like his own—"don't have me arrested! Give me a chance! I haven't taken anything. Don't call the flics!"

He paused, lifting an uncertain hand toward his throat, as if his tongue had gone dry.

"Come, come!" the woman answered, with a look almost of pity. "I haven't called anyone—as yet."

The fingers of one strong white hand were drumming gently on the top of the desk; then, with a movement so quick and sure that Lanyard himself could hardly have bettered it, they slipped to a handle of a drawer, jerked it open, closed round the butt of a revolver and presented it at Lanyard's head.

Automatically he lifted his hands.

"Don't shoot!" he cried. "I'm not armed."

"Is that the truth?"

"You're only to search me, madame!"

"Thanks!" Madame's accents now discovered a trace of somewhat dry humor. "I'll leave that to you. Turn out your pockets on the desk there, and remember, I'll stand no nonsense!"

The weapon covered Lanyard steadily, leaving him no alternative but to obey. As for that, he was glad of the excuse to listen for any sound to indicate how the girl was faring in her flight. And he made a pretense of trembling fingers to cover the slowness with which he complied.

But he heard nothing.

When at length he had visibly turned every pocket inside out, and their contents lay upon the desk, the woman looked them over incuriously.

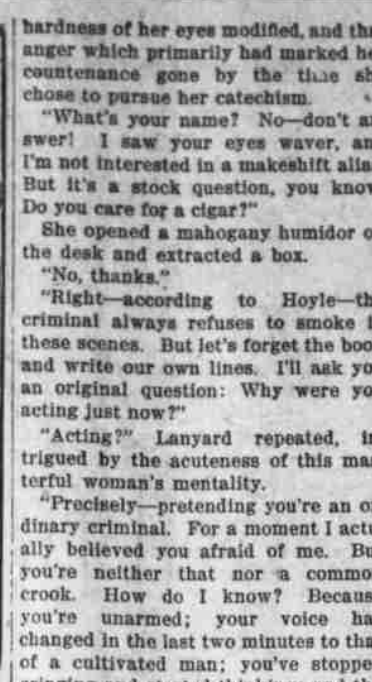
"Put them back," she said curtly. "And then fetch that chair over there—the one in the corner. I've a notion I'd like to talk to you. That's the usual thing, isn't it?"

"How?" Lanyard demanded with a vacant stare.

"In all the criminal novels I've ever read, the law-abiding householder always sits down and has a sociable chat with the housebreaker—before calling in the police. I'm afraid that's part of the price you've to pay for my hospitality."

She paused, eyeing Lanyard inquisitively while he replaced his belongings in his pockets. "Now get that chair," she ordered, and waited, standing until she had been obeyed. "That's it—there! Sit down."

Resting herself against the side of the desk, the revolver held negligently, the speaker favored Lanyard with a second inspection, at her leisure, the



hardness of her eyes modified, and that anger which primarily had marked her countenance gone by the time she chose to pursue her catechism.

"What's your name? No—don't answer! I saw your eyes waver, and I'm not interested in a makeshift alias. But it's a stock question, you know. Do you care for a clear?"

She opened a mahogany humidor on the desk and extracted a box.

"No, thanks."

"Right—according to Hoyle—the criminal always refuses to smoke in these scenes. But let's forget the book and write our own lines. I'll ask you an original question: Why were you acting just now?"

"Acting?" Lanyard repeated, intrigued by the acuteness of this masterful woman's mentality.

"Precisely—pretending you're an ordinary criminal. For a moment I actually believed you afraid of me. But you're neither that nor a common crook. How do I know? Because you're unarmed; your voice has changed in the last two minutes to that of a cultivated man; you've stopped cringing and started thinking; and the way you walked across the floor just now and handled that chair showed me how powerfully you're made. If I hadn't found this revolver you could overpower me in an instant—and I'm no weakling, as women go. Then why the acting?"

Studying his captor with narrow interest, Lanyard smiled faintly and shrugged, but made no response. He could do no more than this—no more than spar for time. The longer he indulged this woman in her whim for the bizarre, the more assured were Lucy's chances of escape. By this time, he reckoned, she must have found her way through the service gate to the street. But he was on edge with apprehension of mischance.

"Come, come!" Mme. Omber insisted. "You're hardly civil, my good man. Answer my question."

"You don't expect me to—do you?"

A glint of anger shone in the woman's eyes.

"You're right," she said shortly; "I dare say Sidonie isn't asleep yet. I'll get her to telephone while I stand guard over you."

Bending over the desk, without removing her gaze from the adventurer, his captor groped for, found and pressed a call-button.

From some remote quarter of the house sounded the grumble of an electric bell.

"Pity you're so brazen," she commented. "Just a little less side, and you'd be a rather engaging person!"

Lanyard made no reply. In fact, he wasn't attending.

In this suspense the iron control which had always heretofore been his was breaking down—since now it was for another that he was concerned. And he wasted no strength trying to enforce it. The stress of his anxiety was both undisguised and indisguisable. Nor did Mme. Omber overlook it.

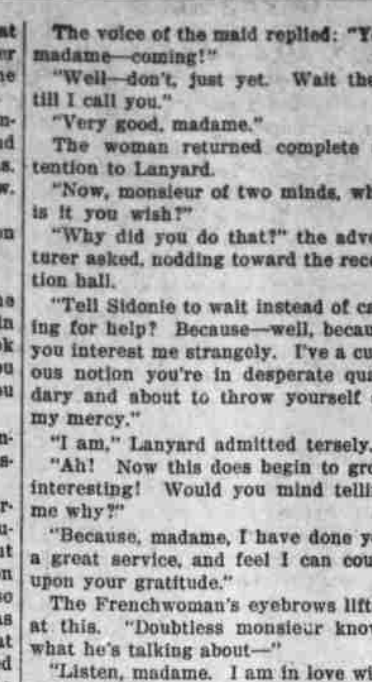
"What's the trouble, eh? Is it that already the cell door clangs loudly in your ears?"

As the woman spoke Lanyard left his chair with a spring as lithe and sure and swift as an animal's, that carried him like a shot across the two yards or so that separated them.

A hair's breadth of error in his reckoning would have finished him, for the other had been alert for just such a move, and the revolver was nearly level with Lanyard's head when he seized it by the barrel, imprisoned the woman's wrist with his other hand, and in two movements had possessed himself of the pistol without hurting its owner.

"Don't be alarmed," he said quietly. "I'm not going to do anything more violent than to put this out of commission."

Breaking it smartly, he shot a shower of cartridges to the floor. The



voice of the maid replied: "Yes, madame—coming!"

"Well—don't, just yet. Wait there till I call you."

"Very good, madame."

The woman returned complete attention to Lanyard.

"Now, monsieur of two minds, what is it you wish?"

"Why did you do that?" the adventurer asked, nodding toward the reception hall.

"Tell Sidonie to wait instead of calling for help! Because—well, because you interest me strangely. I've a curious notion you're in desperate quandary and about to throw yourself on my mercy."

"I am," Lanyard admitted tersely.

"Ah! Now this does begin to grow interesting! Would you mind telling me why?"

"Because, madame, I have done you a great service, and feel I can count upon your gratitude."

The Frenchwoman's eyebrows lifted at this. "Doubtless monsieur knows what he's talking about—"

"Listen, madame. I am in love with a young woman, an American, a stranger, and friendless in Paris. If anything happens to me tonight, if I am arrested or assassinated—"

"Is that likely?"

"Quite likely, madame. I have enemies among the Apaches and in my own profession as well. I have reason to suspect that some of these are in this neighborhood tonight. I may possibly not escape them. In that event, this young lady of whom I speak will need a protector."

"And why must I interest myself in her fate, pray?"

"Because, madame, of this service I have done you. Recently, in London, you were robbed—"

The woman started and colored with excitement. "You know something of my stolen jewels?"

"Everything, madame; it was I who stole them."

"You? You are, then, that Lone Wolf?"

"I was, madame."

"Why the past tense?" the woman demanded, eying him with a gathering frown.

"Because I am done with thieving."

She threw back her head and laughed, but without mirth. "A likely story, monsieur! Have you reformed since I caught you here—"

"Does it matter when I take it that proof, visible, tangible proof of my sincerity, more than a meaningless date, would be needed to convince you?"

"No doubt about that monsieur—the Lone Wolf!"

"Could you wish better proof than that of restoration of your stolen property?"

"Are you trying to bribe me to let you off with an offer to return my jewels?"

"I'm afraid emergency reformation wouldn't persuade you—"

"You do well to be so afraid."

"But if I can prove I've already restored your jewels—"

"But you cannot."

"If madame will do me the favor to open her safe she will find them there—conspicuously placed."

"What nonsense—"

"Am I in error in assuming that madame didn't return from England until quite recently?"

"But today, in fact—"

"And you haven't troubled to investigate your safe since returning?"

"It had not occurred to me—"

"Then why not test my assertion before denying it?"

With an incredulous shrug Mme. Omber terminated a puzzled scrutiny of Lanyard's countenance and turned to the safe.

"But to have done what you declare you have," she argued, "you must have known the combination—since it appears you haven't done any breaking open."

The sequence of the combination ran rigidly off Lanyard's tongue. And at this, with every evidence of excitement, at length beginning to hope—more than to believe—the woman set herself to open the strongbox. Within a minute she had succeeded, and the morocco-bound jewel box was in her hand.

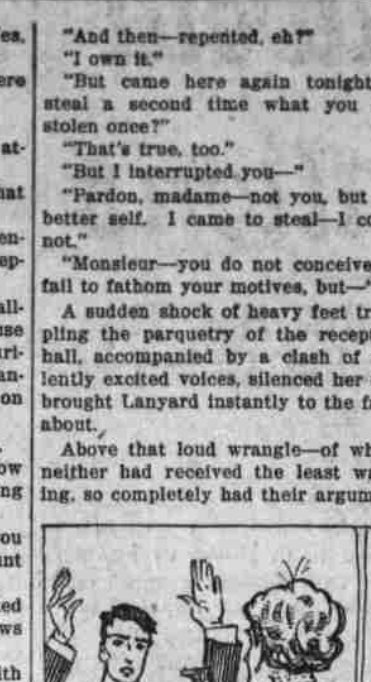
A hasty examination assured her its treasure was intact.

"But why—?" she stammered, pale with emotion—"why, monsieur, why?"

"Because I had decided to leave off stealing for a livelihood."

"When did you bring these jewels here?"

"Four or five nights since."



"And then—repented, eh?"

"I own it."

"But came here again tonight to steal a second time what you had stolen once?"

"That's true, too."

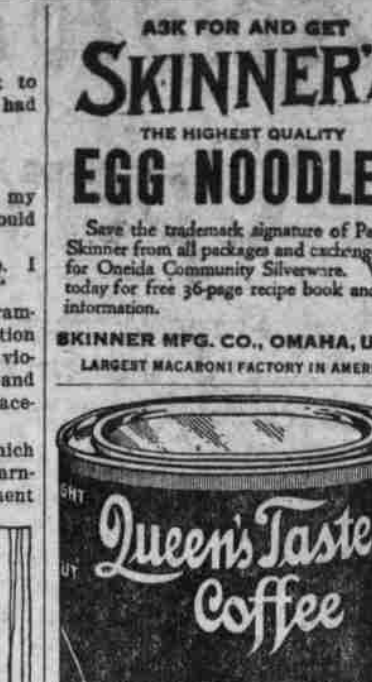
"But I interrupted you—"

"Pardon, madame—not you, but my better self. I came to steal—I could not."

"Monsieur—you do not conceive. I fail to fathom your motives, but—"

A sudden shock of heavy feet trampling the parquet of the reception hall, accompanied by a clash of violently excited voices, silenced her and brought Lanyard instantly to the face about.

"Above that loud wrangle—of which neither had received the least warning, so completely had their argument



absorbed them—Sidonie's accents were audible, clear against the grumble of two voices of heavier timbre—"Madame—madame!"—a cry of protest.

"What is it?" Mme. Omber demanded of Lanyard.

He uttered the word, "Police!" as he turned and threw himself into the recess of the window.

But on wrenching it open the voice of an invisible picket, posted on the lawn, saluted him with a harsh warning; and when, involuntarily, he stepped out upon the balcony, a flash of flame split the gloom below, a report rang loud in the quiet of the park, and a bullet slapped viciously the stone facing at one side of the window.

CHAPTER XXX.

Many Things Happen Fast.

Incontinently—with as little ceremony as though the bullet had lodged in himself—Lanyard tumbled backward into the room, while to a tune of heavy boots clattering through the salons, two sergeants de ville lumbered valiantly into the library and pulled up at sight of Mme. Omber, erect and composed beside her safe, and of Lanyard picking himself up from the floor by the open window.

Behind them Sidonie trotted, wringing her hands.

"Madame!" she bleated—"they wouldn't listen to me, madame—I couldn't stop them!"

"All right, Sidonie. Go back to the hall. I'll call you when I need you. Good morning, messieurs!"

One sergeant advanced with a halting salute and a superfluous question: "Mme. Omber—" But the other waited on the threshold, barring the way.

Lanyard measured the two speculatively—the spokesman was old and fat, ripe for pensioning, little apt to prove seriously effective in a rough and tumble, but the second was young, sturdy, and broad-chested, with the poise of an athlete. Furthermore, he carried, in addition to his sword, a pistol naked in his hand. And his clear blue eyes, meeting the adventurer's, lit up with a glimmer of invitation.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

ELEPHANT GIVES FIRE ALARM

Baby Pachyderm's Grunts Save Large Menagerie From Flames Only Just in Time.

Credit should be forthcoming to Little Nemo. She, "the world's smallest elephant," at last has gained a legitimate story.

The J. H. Eschman World United Shows winters in a couple of vacant lots at Guinotte avenue and Salisbury street, Kansas City, in the East bottom. There are ten cars. A spreading barn protects the animals.

The barnkeeper and assistants were playing rummy in the private car of Mr. Eschman. They heard big grunts from Little Nemo. They rushed out. The interior of the barn was blazing. The elephant had kicked over a gasoline stove in the straw. "Cap" Watkins rushed in. Little Nemo was fast losing her senses in the smoke. It was dark and the "Cap" groped about, until Nemo's halter and shouted, "Come, Nemo!" Nemo came.

In the meantime someone had called the fire department. Before it arrived other assistants had removed the South American llama and the wagon of screaming monkeys from the barn.

Those Dear Girls.

Almee—Young DeSewitt paid you such a lovely compliment last night. Hazel—Indeed! What did he say? Almee—He said you looked enough like me to be his sister.

Bare Faced.

Francis—And why do you prefer yachting to motoring? Francis—A girl doesn't have to wear goggles when yachting.

ALL BIRDS FLEE FOREST

Argonne, Where French and Germans Are in Conflict, Deserted by Their Natural Inhabitants.

When the history of the present European war is written, the forest of Argonne will be recorded as the place where more blood was shed than in any other spot on the wide fields of conflict. The French made a stand there on the first German drive towards Paris, and, later, when the Germans were forced back, it was the scene of weeks and months of desperate struggle.

Not a bird is left in the forest and practically every tree, which remains standing, bears the mark of battle. It was swept by artillery fire time after time, and was the scene of desperate hand-to-hand fighting.

But it was not the first time, for in the campaign preceding the battle of Sedan, in the Franco-German war of 1870, it was the scene of many sanguinary struggles.

The forest covers a number of wooded heights, 500 or 600 feet high, in the northeastern part of France in French Lorraine and Champagne. It is about thirty miles long, and from one to eight miles wide. It is bounded by the sources of the Aisne, runs along that river to the Meuse and northward to Chene-Populeux, separating a stretch of fertile plains from the barren steppes between Vitry and Sedan.

What He Said.

"What did the furniture dealer say when you told him the mirror he sent up was cracked?"

"Said he'd look into it."

COVETED BY ALL

but possessed by few—a beautiful head of hair. If yours is streaked with gray, or is harsh and stiff, you can restore it to its former beauty and luster by using "La Creole" Hair Dressing. Price \$1.00.—Adv.

In some parts of Russia gold has been mined without interruption since 1744.

An engagement ring on the finger is worth two in the pawnshop.

Meat Makes Bad Kidneys

Too much meat is just as bad as not enough. Such a diet is apt to load the blood with uric acid and to injure the kidneys. Bad backs, burs, nervous spells, dizziness, rheumatic pains, and bladder troubles indicate weak kidneys, foretell danger of gravel and Bright's disease. Don't neglect this condition. Use Doan's Kidney Pills.

An Illinois Case

"Bury Picture Title" Edwin Gucker, Western Ave., R. F. D. No. 5, Mattoon, Ill., says: "The pains in my back were so bad I could hardly stoop. The kidney secretions were profuse and too frequent in passage. Doan's told I could live but a short time. Fortunately I used Doan's Kidney Pills and soon improved. My kidneys got normal and the distressing ailments left me. I have been in good health since."

Get Doan's at Any Store, or a Box of Doan's Kidney Pills.

FOSTER-MILBURN CO., BUFFALO, N. Y.